



PRESS RELEASE
*Office of the United States Attorney
Middle District of Florida*

PAUL I. PEREZ
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY

400 North Tampa Street
Suite 3200
Tampa, Florida 33602
813/274-6000
813/274-6300 (Fax)

300 North Hogan Street,
Suite 700
Jacksonville, Florida 32201
904/301-6300
904/301-6310 (Fax)

80 North Hughey Avenue,
Room 201
Orlando, Florida 32801
407/648-7500
407/648-7643 (Fax)

2110 First Street,
Suite 3-137
Fort Myers, Florida 33901
239/461-2200
239/461-2219 (fax)

Contact: Steve Cole ♦ Public Affairs Specialist ♦ 813/274-6352

For Immediate Release

August 25, 2006

FLORIDA LABOR CAMP OWNERS
FOUND GUILTY ON SEVERAL FEDERAL CHARGES

Jacksonville, FL - A federal jury found Ronald Robert Evans, Sr., age 60, guilty on charges of engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise that distributed crack cocaine; conspiracy to distribute crack cocaine; trafficking in untaxed contraband cigarettes; violating the Clean Water Act, violating the Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker Protection Act (2 counts), and structuring cash transactions to avoid financial reporting requirements (50 counts). The defendant's wife, Jequita Evans, age 45, was found guilty of conspiracy to distribute crack cocaine and structuring cash transactions to avoid financial reporting requirements (48 counts). A sentencing date has not yet been set. **See attachment for maximum penalties.**

The trial started on August 10, 2006 and the jury began deliberations on August 23, 2006. Evidence presented at trial showed that Evans, Sr. owns and, with his co-defendants, operates two labor camps for migrant and seasonal agricultural workers – one in East Palatka, Florida, and one in Newton Grove, North Carolina.

According to witnesses, the defendants followed a business model designed to extract the greatest economic benefit at the cheapest possible cost from some homeless people. For many years, the defendants recruited African Americans, mostly men, from homeless shelters and the surrounding streets across the Southeast (Miami, Tampa, Orlando, Jacksonville, New Orleans, Birmingham, Winston-Salem and other cities). The defendants charged the laborers \$50 per week for room and board, and put them to work in the fields for wages at or near minimum wage. At the end of every weekday, after dinner, the defendants gave the workers the opportunity to purchase on credit and at inflated prices, crack cocaine and untaxed generic-quality beer and cigarettes at a "company store" operating at the camp. Records were kept of the laborers' "purchases," and the defendants deducted the purchases from the laborers' weekly pay envelopes. "Advances" of crack cocaine were also available on payday in the workers' pay envelopes. A very large majority of the laborers thus became perpetually indebted to defendant Evans, Sr. The motive behind this business model was wholly economic, designed to drive down labor costs and to turn payment to the laborers into another source of profit completely apart from the farm labor the business provided to its farmer customers. The evidence at trial showed that after making the deductions for the crack, beer, and cigarettes, the Evanses were paying the workers on average about 30 cents on the dollar.

As a result of this business model, the need arose for ready access to substantial amounts of cash to acquire "crack" on a regular basis. The defendants obtained the money by cashing checks written by their farmer clients. Because large cash transactions must be reported by financial institutions, the defendants instructed the farmers to structure the

payments to comply with the reporting requirements. After Evans, Sr. was indicted, he obstructed justice by persuading one farmer to lie on his behalf to investigating IRS agents and to deny that the structuring took place.

With respect to the Clean Water Act Count, Cow Creek, a primary tributary of the St. Johns River, flows along the southern border of the Evanses' labor camp in East Palatka. Evans, Sr. directed that a large PVC pipe be connected to the labor camp's heavily used septic tanks. The pipe continuously carried raw, untreated human excrement underground for some distance and then deposited it directly into Cow Creek. The result was severe contamination of the creek, which flows, after about a mile, directly into the St. Johns River.

United States Attorney Paul I. Perez stated, "Causing homeless people to incur large debts by selling them crack, cigarettes, and beer forces these individuals into a form of servitude that is morally and legally reprehensible. My office will continue to investigate and prosecute those labor camp owners and operators who take advantage of the disadvantaged by such outrageous behavior."

This case was investigated by the U.S. Department of Labor- Office of Inspector General, the Environmental Protection Agency Criminal Investigation Division, IRS Criminal Investigations, the Putnam County Sheriff's Office, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney John Sciortino of the Jacksonville Division of the United States Attorney's Office and Susan French of the United States Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Criminal Section.

Charges and Maximum Penalties

21 U.S.C. 848

Engaging in a Continuing Criminal Enterprise that distributed crack cocaine

Mandatory minimum of 20 years' imprisonment up to life imprisonment, \$2 million fine

21 U.S.C. 846

Conspiracy to distribute crack cocaine

Mandatory minimum of 10 years' imprisonment up to life imprisonment, \$4 million fine

18 U.S.C. 2342 and 2344

Trafficking in untaxed contraband cigarettes

5 years' imprisonment, \$250,000 fine

33 U.S.C. 1311 and 1319(c)(2)(A)

Violating the Clean Water Act

3 years' imprisonment, \$250,000 fine

29 U.S.C. 1811(a) et seq

Violating the Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker Protection Act

1 year of imprisonment, \$100,000 fine each count

31 U.S.C. 5324 et seq

Structuring cash transactions to avoid financial reporting requirements

10 years' imprisonment , \$500,000 each count

18 U.S.C. 1512(b)(3)

Witness tampering

10 years' imprisonment , \$250,000